

HISTORIC

Gabrielle Elliott

The Skull Creek, Colorado, area was settled in the early 1900's. First settlement took place around 1907 when homesteaders began to file claims and build homes. These people were attempting to farm in the region. However, the soil was poor, there was little water and drought was common. Most of the early homesteads failed and the settlers moved out. During the year 1910 to about 1930, there were possibly sixty or seventy people living in the Skull Creek Basin. To serve these farmers, little towns with post offices, general stores and other services were founded. Skull Creek, Massadona, and Blue Mountain all came into being about 1910. These towns survived due to roads leading to them from Craig, Meeker, Rangely and Vernal, Utah. In 1923, U. S. Highway 40 was built across the area and passed through these settlements, thus assuring their continuation. During the 1920's abandonment of homesteads continued and by the early 1930's grazing was replacing farming. From that point on, cattle and sheep raising took over as the dominant economic factor and many homesteads were consolidated into larger ranches. This type of industry has continued to the present and remains the main life source for those who still live in the Skull Creek area.

The other major economic development in the Skull Creek/Blue Mountain region was mining. From about 1912 to the 1940's copper and some precious mineral extraction took place. The Yampa, Colorado newspaper noted that a mining "boom" was occurring on Blue Mountain in April, 1912, and that considerable gold placers were being developed. However, the rush died out and copper mines became the only viable mines in the area. To the east side of the Basin, uranium mines were dug in the late 1940's and early 1950's concurrent with the general "uranium boom" of that period. All of western Colorado was swept with uranium fever but the demand soon faded and so did the hopes of the numerous miners. Since that time, there has been little mining activity in the Skull Creek Basin.

Most of the historic resources that remain in the Skull Creek Basin consist of old homesteads and mines. Nearly all of these sites are located on private lands and have been consolidated into larger ranch units. The oldest sites date from about 1910 while the newest sites were built in the 1930's. These sites are representative of farming and mining attempts in the area and typify the types of historic use in the Skull Creek Area. Based on a preliminary survey, the following sites were evaluated:

Site Number 001. Jacks Springs, Colorado. This site is on private land and consists of two cabins with outbuildings. It was built by George Melton in 1907 as a homestead. The site may qualify for the National Register. It is in fair condition.

Site Number 002. Jacks Springs, Colorado, area. This site consists of a single log cabin located on a bluff overlooking Jacks Springs. It was built in 1932 by Minnie Chapman of Vernal, Utah, to provide a home for herself and her daughter. This was a Stockraising Homestead. This site is in poor condition. It may qualify for inclusion on the National Register. Located on private land.

Site Number 003. This site consists of the remains of a cabin located on private land. The cabin is evidence of an old homestead. The site was homesteaded in 1920 by Christian Stoner. The site was used for farming and was probably abandoned in the mid-1930. This site is a typical dry-land farm homestead. it is in very poor condition and may not qualify for the National Register.

Site Number 004. This site consists of the remains of a fireplace and a root cellar. The site is located on private land and was a homestead. It represents a dry-land farmstead, built in 1922 possibly by James Graham. It is in very poor condition and may not qualify for inclusion on the National Register.

Site Number 005. A mine building located on private property consists of the remains of a rock structure. The building is probably associated with nearby mine adits. It is probably 50-60 years old. The site may qualify for the National Register upon further investigation.

Site Number 006. Mine Building. This site, located on private land consists of a log cabin with several outbuildings. It has been in use until about 10 years ago and probably is associated with the nearby mines. The cabin may have been a miner's homesite. It is in fair condition and, may be eligible for the National Register upon further investigation.

Site Number 007. Mine Tipple and adits. This site, on national resource lands consists of five adits and a metal tipple. The tipple also has a cable tram car system up the side of a sheer cliff. This mine represents early copper mining in the region. The site is in good condition. This site may qualify for the National Register upon further examination.

Site Number 008. Skull Creek, Colorado. This site, located on private land, is the town site of Skull Creek. It consists of five houses with outbuildings. The town dates from about 1910 and represents one of the first service centers for the Skull Creek area. This site may qualify for the National Register upon investigation.

Site Number 009. Corral and dugout. This site, located on State of Colorado land, consists of a wooden corral with a small dugout in the banks of Skull Creek. The dugout shows no artifacts in the area and the corral is in ruins. The site was probably part of early cattle drives into Skull Creek for trans-shipment. The corral may date from 1930. This site may qualify for the National Register upon further investigation.

Site-Number 010. Miller (Biles) Homestead. This site consists of a cabin, located on national resource lands, several outbuildings and some plied stones. The site is in poor condition, how-ever, it may be of extreme historic value in that it may be the first homestead in the Miller Creek area. If this is the Bites Ranch, it dates from 192G and was settled by William Biles. This site may qualify for the National Register upon further investigation.

Site Number 011. Jones Homestead. This site consists of a house, root cellar, outbuilding, corral, outhouse and barn/garage, located on private lands. The site is near Blair Spring and dates from 1908 when James W. Jones filed on this land. It is currently abandoned and in good condition. This site may qualify for the National Register upon further investigation.

Site Number 012. Corral Ruins. This site, located on private land consists of the remains of a wooden corral and barn. It is in very poor condition and is of little historic value. However, the site might yield further information upon investigation by a historical archeologist. The site, currently, may not qualify for the National Register. This site may represent the remains of the J. J. Shelton homestead, patented in 1920.

Site Number 013 Victory Highway. This site which runs across certain national resource lands consists of a paved highway about twenty feet wide. This is part of the original Victory Highway (U.S. 40) built in the early 1920's. This highway was one of the first paved roads in the northwest corner of Colorado and is of historic value. This site may qualify for the National Register.

Site Number 014. Massadona, Colorado. No site form filled out. Located on

private lands.

Site Number 015. Mansfield Cabin. This site, located on private land, consists of a cabin, an older log cabin, a windmill, a storage tank, and a corral. The site was homesteaded by Walter Mansfield in 1917 and was used for farming. This site is a typical dry-land farm. The site is in good condition and may qualify for the National Register upon further investigation.

Site Number 016. Bridge. This structure, located on national resource lands, is a log and plank bridge with a triangular truss. It is a rather unique little bridge that was built of local materials. This bridge may qualify for the National Register as being unique and of local historic significance.

The above sites represent a limited survey of known historic resources in the Skull Creek area. These sites are of historic value, and may also be of value to a historical archeologist for the purpose of determining broad social, economic, and ecological patterns within the region.

Management Opportunities - Skull Creek

Since all but three sites are located on private lands, acquisition of the remaining historic sites would be required. However, in some cases, the sites may not warrant acquisition. Only certain selected historic sites should be considered. These would include representative examples of early homesteads that could be used for educational and interpretive purposes. Such early homesteads as the Melton site (1907) (Site number 001); the Stoner Cabin, 1920 (Site number 003); the Jones Homestead, 1904 (Site number 011); and the Mansfield Cabin, 1917 (Site number 015), should be interpreted and recorded. Site numbers 003 and 001 are in poor condition and would require considerable restoration. Since they are representative examples, they could be recorded as per the Historic American Building Survey method and also could be excavated by historic archeologists and then be provided with interpretive signs. The other sites, above mentioned, are in good to fair condition and could be recorded by the HARS method; in the case of

site number 015 and 011, some stabilization could be done and the sites could then be interpreted for public use.

The historic sites on BLM land consist of a bridge (Site number 016) and a mine (Site number 007). The mine is nearly inaccessible and would be of interpretive value only. The bridge is quaint but not overly significant. An interpretive signing should be sufficient to cover it.

Generally, Management Opportunities for historic resources In Skull Creek are limited by the nature of landholding patterns. Over all, the area could be effectively interpreted and used by providing a point by point brochure discussing the history (and archeology) of the region and then using a numbering and signing system to tie the brochure to specific sites. In this way, the user would be able to understand the over-all historic importance of the area and then he could see the actual sites in their present condition. This could provide a valuable object lesson in land use and misuse by humans.